NOTEBOOK

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College of Education
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Bonnie McBride, DATA Project Manager, interacts with children in the dramatic play area.

LIKE HAVING MY SON AT HARVARD!

Grateful parents share praise of the EEU

For more than 30 years, the award-winning Experimental Education Unit at the University of Washington has been at the cutting edge of early childhood special education. Families whose children attend this model school on the UW campus know they are benefiting from the best programs available anywhere.

As Pilar McCary puts it, "Being at the EEU is like having my son at Harvard! We constantly meet parents who have moved to Seattle from around the country just to have their children here. Everywhere we go we tell everybody about the EEU and the successes we've had."

For students in the program their son Warren attends, those successes may seem small but are truly life-changing. The program is called DATA, Developmentally Appropriate Treatment for Autism, and was founded to test a promising model for educating young children with autism in a public school setting.

Program Director Ilene Schwartz, explains, "In the field of autism, lots of people are saying that they have the right way to treat children with autism and that school districts should pay for it. However, we think that many of these treatments are not developmentally appropriate—for example, several are prescribing a 40-hour per week program for preschoolers—and that the research supporting them is not strong. Our goal is a program that's effective, sustainable, and developmentally appropriate and which meets the needs of children, families, and school districts."

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"To watch the staff with your child, it's just wonderful what they do!" PILAR McCARY

IN PRAISE OF THE EEU **continued from previous page**

In the DATA model, children with autism attend the EEU's ongoing preschool program with normally developing peers on a conventional preschool schedule. They then receive an additional 1 1/2 hours of individualized attention in an "extended day" program, for a total school time of 20 hours per week. The student's families receive social and technical support from the DATA program's Family Services Coordinator (currently a doctoral student, Gusty-Lee Boulware), who helps solve specific problems the families may be having.

"We've seen incredible changes in some of these children," says Schwartz. "They're little things but extremely important. For example, one boy started the program at age five and wasn't toilet trained. Now he is. It's a big issue for the family. Other children never ate dinner with their families and now do. There are children who weren't talking and now they are—some remarkable changes in ability to function."

If the McCarys could choose, they would make the program available to families everywhere. "The DATA program was a major turning point in Warren's life," says Pilar.

"Circle time" activities help students in the EEU preschool practice following instructions.

"He's come so far I can't tell you...Warren is now able to sit in circle time quietly, to focus on activities in the classroom, to participate in song and dance activities, to follow instructions when his name is called—not only to ask his peers for snacks but also to pass out the juice himself! I get wonderful notes about his progress."

Parent stories document 30 years of service

The DATA program is one of the latest in a dynamic series of innovative models developed and tested at the EEU. Highlights of this history include:

- work in the 1960s on systematic behavioral interventions;
- development in the 1970s of effective educational practices for children with Down syndrome and severe disabilities;
- in the 1980s, demonstrations that preschool children with and without disabilities can learn together;
- in the 1990s, effective communication strategies for non-verbal children;
- experience since the 1980s in developing effective methods for teaching children with autism and supporting their families.

The success of these achievements is documented in part through letters from grateful parents. These excerpts are examples; they share experiences of children with and without disabilities who have been students at the EEU:

When Becca arrived at the EEU a little more than three years ago, (when she was 3 years and 3 months old) she was certainly not the same little girl we see today. She stood only on wobbly legs; she walked only when coerced and then each step was a struggle; she spoke only in short monosyllabic bursts and most of what she said was unintelligible. We were not certain what was wrong with her but we knew she was developing slowly. We hoped for the best.

If she had never learned to stand on her own, we would love her. If she had never learned to walk with a confident step, we would love her. If she had never learned to speak with clarity, we would love her still. But, with the training and guidance of your staff, she now stands firmly; she runs with the wind; and she speaks a never-ending dialogue of wonder.

Respectfully,
Gary and Kathleen Brose

Warren's progress outside of school has been equally important for the family, adds his father, Don. "Whatever our needs and concerns, Gusty-Lee would help us. For example, we had difficulty with Warren sitting at the table; she helped us with this, and now we have a calmer dinnertime.

"We also asked her for help with Warren's Sunday school class at church. This has been really important. She came to work with the teachers, and they learned so much that we can go to Sunday school together ourselves for the first time since he was born! The EEU has transformed not only our home, but our church as well."

"The EEU has changed our lives," Don and Pilar agree. "We have a little boy now. We can look in his eyes and see a person. He's a delight. The EEU has kept us having hope because week after week it's one thing after another... There's not enough money in the world to provide what they've given us. We can't thank them enough." ■

Pilar and Don McCary and their sons, Warren and William.

"The EEU has changed our lives. We can't thank them enough."

Children with limited verbal skills learn to communicate their wants and needs with a picture exchange system, called PECs.

We feel very fortunate our children Tasha and Ben have started their education with the benefit of having been with you.

The community at the EEU have taught my "typically developing" kids so many rich values I hope they will cherish for a lifetime. They have no fear of people who are different from them. Instead they look beyond what we see with our eyes and embrace our universal humanness.

These gifts you have given our family have enriched our lives. We are grateful and honored to have been included in such an empowering educational experience. You have been the first step outside the family and into the world, and in this you have taught invaluable lessons.

Many thanks,
Tom and Kathy Bylenok